THE EVENTS OF KARBALA

Texts from the Books of History

Prof. Dr ʿAlawī ibn Ḥāmid ibn Muhammad ibn Shihāb al-Dīn

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Few events in Islamic history have pierced the heart of the Ummah like the tragedy of Karbala. When the grandson of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood against tyranny, besieged, and abandoned by those who had promised him aid, he chose death over humiliation and refused to legitimise falsehood at the expense of truth, honour, and religion.

Drawing on the classical authorities of Ahl al-Sunnah: Ibn Kathīr, al-Balādhurī, al-Dhahabī, Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Ḥajar and others, this book recounts the events that led to the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn through the recognised sources, letting the historical record speak for itself. Free of sectarian polemic, it traces the road to Karbala, the betrayal that unfolded, and the harrowing aftermath borne by the household of the Prophet ﷺ.

More than a history, it is a reminder that loving the Ahl al-Bayt is part of faith, that silence in the face of oppression carries devastating consequences, and that Allah honours the people of truth even when they appear outwardly defeated.

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SAKINA

A Poem by Imam al-Shāfiʿī on the Martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn

تَأَوَّهَ قَلْبِي وَالْفُؤَادُ كَئِيبٌ
وَأَرَّقَ نَوْمِي فَالسُّهَادُ عَجِيبُ

My heart groans in anguish,
and my soul is filled with sorrow;
Sleep has abandoned me,
and this sleeplessness is strange indeed.

وَمِمَّا نَفَىٰ نَوْمِي وَشَيَّبَ لِمَّتِي
تَصَارِيفُ أَيَّامٍ لَهُنَّ خُطُوبُ

Among the things that have driven sleep from
my eyes and turned the locks of my hair grey
Are the changing trials and calamities of time.

فَمَنْ مُبْلِغٌ عَنِّي الْحُسَيْنَ رِسَالَةً
وَإِنْ كَرِهَتْهَا أَنْفُسٌ وَقُلُوبُ

Who will convey from me a message to Ḥusayn,
Even if hearts and souls dislike to hear it?

ذَبِيحٌ بِلاَ جُرْمٍ كَأَنَّ قَمِيصَهُ
صَبِيغٌ بِمَاءِ الْأُرْجُوَانِ خَضِيبُ

Slaughtered without any crime, as though his garment were dyed crimson with the stain of purple blood.

فَلِلسَّيْفِ إِعْوَالٌ وَلِلرُّمْحِ رَنَّةٌ
وَلِلْخَيْلِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الصَّهِيلِ نَحِيبُ

The sword cries aloud in lamentation, the spear gives forth its ringing cry,
And even the horses, after their neighing, seem to wail in grief.

تَزَلْزَلَتِ الدُّنْيَا لِآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ
وَكَادَتْ لَهُمْ صُمُّ الْجِبَالِ تَذُوبُ

The world itself trembled for the family of Muḥammad,
And the mighty solid mountains nearly melted for their sake.

وَغَارَتْ نُجُومٌ وَاقْشَعَرَّتْ كَوَاكِبٌ

وَهُتِكَ أَسْتَارٌ وَشُقَّ جُيُوبُ

Stars vanished, constellations shuddered in terror,
Veils were torn apart and garments rent in mourning.

يُصَلَّىٰ عَلَى الْمَبْعُوثِ مِنْ آلِ هَاشِمٍ

وَيُغْزَىٰ بَنُوهُ إِنَّ ذَا لَعَجِيبُ!

Blessings are sent upon the one sent forth from Banū Hāshim,
Yet his own sons are attacked and slain, truly this is astonishing!

لَئِنْ كَانَ ذَنْبِي حُبَّ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

فَذَلِكَ ذَنْبٌ لَسْتُ عَنْهُ أَتُوبُ

If loving the family of Muḥammad is my sin,
Then it is a sin from which I shall never repent.

هُمْ شُفَعَائِي يَوْمَ حَشْرِي وَمَوْقِفِي
إِذَا مَا بَدَتْ لِلنَّاظِرِينَ خُطُوبُ

They are my intercessors on the Day of Standing, When grave terrors appear before the onlookers.[247]

247 Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* - Volume 3.

On Mourning the Ahl al-Bayt at Karbala
By Al-Būṣīrī

يَا أَبَا الْقَاسِمِ، يَا مَنْ عَقَدْتُ عَلَىٰ مَدْحِهِ الثَّنَاءَ،
وَأَقْسَمْتُ بِحَقِّهِ قَسَمًا لَا أُخْلِفُهُ،

O Abu'l-Qāsim, to whom I have bound myself by solemn oath, an oath of praise and exaltation for you.

وَبِمَا أَوْدَعَ اللهُ فِيكَ مِنَ الْعُلُومِ وَالْأَسْرَارِ،
مِنْ غَيْرِ تَعْلِيمِ بَشَرٍ وَلَا إِمْلَاءِ كَاتِبٍ،

By the knowledge bestowed upon you from Allah,
Without dictation from any scribe.

وَبِرِيحِ الصَّبَا الَّتِي سَخَّرَهَا اللهُ لِنَصْرِكَ شَهْرًا كَامِلًا،
فَكَأَنَّهَا مَأْمُورَةٌ بِأَمْرِكَ، مُطِيعَةٌ لِإِشَارَتِكَ،

And by the east wind that travelled for a month to bring you victory,
As though the wind itself moved gently at your command.

وَبِعَلِيٍّ، حِينَ نَفَثْتَ فِي عَيْنَيْهِ وَهُمَا رَمْدَاوَانِ،
فَعَادَ يُبْصِرُ بِبَصَرِ نَسْرٍ جَارِحٍ،

And by ʿAlī, when you breathed into his eyes,
Though both of them were afflicted with soreness

فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَتْ فِيهِ رَايَةُ الْحَرْبِ تُدْعَىٰ بِالْعُقَابِ،

He arose with the sight of an eagle,
In a battle where the Eagle was the standard

وَبِرَيْحَانَتَيْكَ الْحَسَنِ وَالْحُسَيْنِ،
اللَّذَيْنِ اسْتَوْدَعَتْهُمَا الزَّهْرَاءُ مِنْ طِيبِكَ وَنُورِكَ،

And by your two fragrant blossoms, whose sweetness came from you, whom al-Zahrāʾ carried within her

كُنْتَ تَضُمُّهُمَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْبًا وَمَحَبَّةً،
كَمَا تَضُمُّ الْيَاءُ نُقْطَتَيْهَا،

You used to draw them close to yourself
As the letter yāʾ gathers its two dots beneath it.

شَهِيدَانِ لَا أَنْسَىٰ مُصَابَهُمَا،
وَلَا أَنْسَىٰ مَأْسَاةَ الطَّفِّ وَكَرْبَلَاءَ،

Two martyrs whose tragedy I can never forget.
Nor can I ever forget the tragedy of al-Ṭaff and
the anguish of Karbalā

قَوْمٌ لَمْ يَرْعَوْا لَكَ حُرْمَةً فِي ذُرِّيَّتِكَ،
وَقَدْ خَانَ الرُّؤَسَاءُ عَهْدَكَ وَوَصِيَّتَكَ،

Those placed in authority showed no regard for
your sanctity concerning them,
Though their leaders had betrayed your
covenant

بَدَّلُوا الْمَوَدَّةَ لِأَهْلِ قُرْبَاكَ عَدَاوَةً وَجَفَاءً،
وَأَظْهَرَتِ النُّفُوسُ نِفَاقَهَا وَخُبْثَهَا،

They exchanged affection and kinship for
treachery,
And hypocrisy revealed its hidden burrows.

وَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ
بَكَتْ لِفَقْدِهِمُ الْأَرْضُ وَالسَّمَاءُ،

Hearts among them grew hard against those
Whose loss caused both earth and heaven to weep.

فَابْكِهِمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتَ،
فَإِنَّ الْبُكَاءَ مَهْمَا عَظُمَ قَلِيلٌ أَمَامَ هٰذِهِ الْفَاجِعَةِ،

So weep for them as much as you are able,
For tears are but little beside so immense a calamity.

فَكُلُّ يَوْمٍ مُنْذُ مُصَابِهِمْ عَاشُورَاءُ،
وَكُلُّ أَرْضٍ صَارَتْ فِي قَلْبِي كَرْبَلَاءَ،

Every day and every land, because of my grief for them, Has become a Karbala and an ʿĀshūrā'.

يَا آلَ بَيْتِ النَّبِيِّ، إِنَّ قَلْبِي
لَا يَجِدُ عَنْكُمْ سُلْوَانًا وَلَا عَزَاءً،

O family of the Prophet, my heart
Finds no consolation away from you.

غَيْرَ أَنِّي فَوَّضْتُ أَمْرِي إِلَى اللهِ،
فَفِي تَفْوِيضِ الْأُمُورِ إِلَيْهِ الطُّمَأْنِينَةُ وَالنَّجَاةُ،

Except that I have entrusted my affair to Allah,
And entrusting affairs to Him brings relief.

كَمْ مِنْ يَوْمٍ مُؤْلِمٍ فِي كَرْبَلَاءَ
خَفَّفَتْ بَعْضَ آلَامِهِ الزَّوْرَاءُ،

How many a painful day in Karbala
Had some of its sorrow lightened by al-Zawrā'
(Baghdad).

بَيْنَمَا كَانَ أَعْدَاؤُكُمْ مَطْرُوحِينَ صَرْعَىٰ،
كَأَنَّ أَرْوَاحَهُمْ قَدِ انْفَلَتَتْ مِنْ أَجْسَادِهِمْ،

While the enemies lay fallen,
As though each of them were a wineskin whose
fastening had been untied.

يَا آلَ بَيْتِ النَّبِيِّ، طِبْتُمْ وَطَابَ ذِكْرُكُمْ،
فَطَابَ مَدْحِي لَكُمْ وَطَابَ رِثَائِي،

O family of the Prophet, you are pure, and thus pure for me, Are the praises and elegies composed for you.

أَنَا فِي مَدْحِكُمْ كَحَسَّانِ بْنِ ثَابِتٍ،
وَإِذَا بَكَيْتُكُمْ وَرَثَيْتُكُمْ فَأَنَا كَالْخَنْسَاءِ،

I am the Ḥassān bin Thābit of your praises; And when I lament for you, then indeed I become Khansā'.

سُدْتُمُ النَّاسَ بِالتُّقَىٰ وَالطَّهَارَةِ،
بَيْنَمَا سَادَ غَيْرُكُمْ بِالذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ.

You attained mastery over people through piety,
While others attained mastery only through silver and gold.[248]

248 *Dīwān al-Būṣīrī*

Selected Verses of Qaṣīda ʿAyniyya by Imam ʿAbdallah ibn ʿAlawī al-Ḥaddād

Ḥabīb ʿUmar ibn Zayn ibn Sumayṭ d. 1207 AH relates that the reason for the sighs of our master in Qaṣīda ʿAyniyya was that one of the scholars of the Āl Bā Sharāḥīl of al-Ghurayb had read the account of the killing of our master, the martyred grandson, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, together with those great men of his household who were killed alongside him at Karbalā', and what befell them. He had related this at length, mentioning what happened to them at the hands of the enemies of Allah and His Messenger. May Allah deal with them all by His justice. On hearing this account, Imam al-Haddad was overwhelmed with sorrow. Then he composed the following verses.

آهِ عَلَى تِلْكَ الدِّيَارِ وَأَهْلِهَا مِنْ حَادِثِ الدَّهْرِ
الْمُمِضِّ الْمُوجِعِ

Ah, for those dwellings and their inhabitants
From the painful and distressing events of time

آهِ عَلَى تِلْكَ الْخِيَامِ وَمَا حَوَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ غَانٍ
بِالْجَمَالِ الْمُبْدِعِ

Ah, for those tents and all that they contained,
Of all the beauties of creation

آهِ عَلَى تِلْكَ الْقِبَابِ وَمَا بِهَا مِنْ قَاصِرٍ
وَمُحَجَّبٍ وَمُبَرْقَعِ

Ah, for those canopies and those within them,
of maidens kept within, veiled and concealed.

آهِ عَلَى تِلْكَ الرِّيَاضِ وَكُلِّ مَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْغِيدِ
الْحِسَانِ الرُّتَّعِ

Ah, for those gardens and all that they held,
of graceful, beautiful maidens moving freely
within them.

آهِ عَلَى تِلْكَ الْحِيَاضِ وَمَنْ بِهَا مِنْ وَارِدٍ
أَوْ شَارِبٍ مُتَضَلِّعِ

Ah, for those watering-places and those
gathered there, whether coming to drink,
drinking, or drinking their fill.

آهِ عَلَى غِزْلَانِ حَاجِرٍ وَالنَّقَا وَظِبَاءِ وَادِي
الْمُنْحَنَى وَالْأَجْرَعِ

Ah, for the gazelles of Ḥājir and al-Naqā,
and the deer of Wādī al-Munḥanā and al-Ajraʿ.

آهِ عَلَى آرَامِ رَامَةَ تَرْتَعِي بِسُفُوحِهَا وَحِمَاهَا
الْمُتَمَنِّعِ

Ah, for the white antelopes of Rāmah, grazing
upon its slopes and within its guarded
sanctuary.

آهِ عَلَى أَقْمَارِ أَفْلَاكِ الْعُلَا وَشُمُوسِهَا الْمُشْرِقَاتِ
السُّطَّعِ

Ah, for the moons of the high heavens,
and its radiant, shining suns.[249]

249 Hasan al-Kāf, *Wāqiʿat al-Ṭaff*, Markaz al-ʿUrayḍī, First edition 2020.

Imam al-Ḥaddād also has a tawassul, mentioning Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, in one of his poems, which opens with the lines:

إِلَيْكَ يَا رَبِّ، يَا عَالِمًا بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ
إِلَيْكَ يَا رَبِّ، يَا مَنْ لَهُ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ

To You, O Lord, O Knower of what lies within
the breasts; To You, O Lord, O One to whom
all affairs return.

وَبِالْحَسَنِ ذِي زُهْدٍ فِي مُلْكِ دَارِ الْغُرُورِ
وَبِالْحُسَيْنِ الَّذِي غَدَرُوا بِهِ أَهْلُ الْفُجُورِ

And by Ḥasan, the one who renounced the
kingdom of this abode of delusion;
And by Ḥusayn, whom the people of wickedness
betrayed.

شَهِيدٍ بِالطَّفِّ، فَائِزٍ بِالرِّضَا وَالسُّرُورِ
وَرَاحَ قَاتِلُهُ يَدْعُو فِي لَظَى بِالثُّبُورِ

A martyr at al-Ṭaff, triumphant through divine
pleasure and joy;
While his killer went forth calling for
destruction in the Fire of torment.[250]

250 Ibid

He ﷺ also said:

In these times, trials and bloody conflicts are not to be thought strange. Indeed, those at the forefront of the Imams and the first generation of this Ummah were tested with calamities even greater than this, until Imam al-Ḥusayn was martyred and his head was carried around for a number of days. His womenfolk and children were violated. Before him, the Prophet's grandson, Ḥasan, was poisoned, his liver was torn apart by the poison, and he died from it. Before him, the Commander of the Believers, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, was killed, and he was cursed from the pulpits during most of the days of Banī Umayyah. His grave was even concealed out of fear that it would be dug up.

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